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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ TAKES AIM AT HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B
) AND (D)

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (C) During his February 15 "Alo Presidente" broadcast, President Chavez accused several human rights organizations of receiving funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) through the Washington-based Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) to help overthrow the GOV. Several of the named NGOs issued statements rejecting the accusation and demanding that Chavez retract his statements. While publicly projecting an image of fearlessness in the face of this frontal attack, the organizations' directors privately acknowledge their worry about the possible consequences of being labeled as traitors.

End Summary.

[¶](#)2. (U) During his February 15 "Alo Presidente" broadcast, President Chavez accused several human rights organizations of receiving funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) through the Washington-based Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), itself a recipient of NED funding. Chavez named the Human Rights Education and Action Program (PROVEA), the Committee of Relatives and Victims of the February 1989 Events (COFAVIC), the Support Network (Red de Apoyo), and the Human Rights Office of the Catholic Church (Vicaria), among others. Chavez claimed that the NGOs, like Sumate, had accepted NED funding to participate in efforts to overthrow the GOV. Vice President Rangel followed up February 16 with a statement that the NGOs had broken the law, citing a Supreme Court ruling that limits the activities of organizations that receive foreign funding.

[¶](#)3. (U) PROVEA fired back with a February 17 press release denying it has ever requested or received funding from the USG. It also affirmed that doing so would not be a crime, and it acknowledged its strong working relationship with CEJIL. The NGO states that it has condemned all "ruptures of constitutional continuity," including Chavez' own 1992 coup attempt and the brief presidency of Pedro Carmona in April [¶](#)2002. PROVEA also reminded the President that it has requested protective measures favoring Chavez from the Inter-American Human Rights Court, but that it would not be deterred from its work "by threats from any government official, current or future."

[¶](#)4. (U) PROVEA plans to invoke its right under Article 58 of the Constitution to demand that the President rectify the damage he has caused by making false statements. COFAVIC and the Vicaria made similar statements on February 16 and accused Chavez of "setting a very negative precedent," according to news reports.

[¶](#)5. (C) Carlos Correa and Liliana Ortega, directors, respectively, of PROVEA and COFAVIC, told poloff February 18 that they are very concerned about the possible consequences for their staff and activities as a result of being labeled traitors by Chavez. According to Ortega, "the threatening email and phone calls have already begun." Correa told poloff that PROVEA had activated its normal security procedures and is staying alert, "but so far we haven't been subjected to any direct threats or violence."

[¶](#)6. (C) Jose Gregorio Guarenes, the Vicaria's general coordinator, told poloff February 19 his staff is receiving threatening email and phone calls, and that being singled out by Chavez has "definite security implications," as they go about their usual activities. He also told poloff that the National Assembly (AN) appointed a committee February 18 to investigate all of the human rights NGOs named by Chavez. "The investigation will only magnify the danger for us," he said.

[¶](#)7. (U) Amnesty International issued a statement February 18 insisting that Chavez respect the work of human rights NGOS, emphasizing that international human rights treaties, to

which Venezuela is a signatory, form the basis for such work.

COMMENT

18. (U) In November 2000, the Supreme Court ruled that NGOs that receive funding from foreign governments or whose leaders are not Venezuelan are not part of civil society. The ruling concludes that such NGOs may not represent citizens in court or bring their own legal action, but it does not criminalize the acceptance of foreign funding. All of the organizations named by Chavez receive funding from a variety of foreign sources and state that their financing is public information.

19. (C) The common characteristic of the human rights NGOs named by the President is their refusal to wink at certain actions for political or monetary reasons. It is precisely this institutional integrity and independence that threatens Chavez and has led him to seize on the link to CEJIL and the NED as a means to weaken a societal sector that he doesn't control.

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